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ABSTRACT

During the last 2 years, private school growth in the Millard Public School District (Omaha, Nebraska) exceeded that of public schools. This paper presents findings of a study that examined why parents in the Millard Public School District enrolled their children in private schools. A survey sent to 1,107 parents of private school students elicited 384 returns. Religious instruction (293 responses) and strict discipline policies (n=145) topped the list of things that parents said they were seeking in private schools. Parents reported that they sent their children to private schools in order to avoid the lack of strict discipline, lack of parent-approved values, sex education, and certain aspects of curriculum and instruction in the public schools. Some categories of responses were significantly different across groups defined by grade-level of instruction and by Catholic versus non-Catholic school of choice. Five tables are included. Appendices contain a copy of the survey instrument, coding categories, and a review of empirical research on private-school choice. (LMI)

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# Why Parents Choose Private Schooling: Implications for Public School Programs and Information Campaigns

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# Why Parents Choose Private Schooling: Implications for Public School Programs and Information Campaigns


## Abstract

*This study analyzed the responses of a random sample of parents of private school students who reside within the boundaries of the district. There were 384 returns (out of 1,107 surveys sent) received, for a return rate of 34.7%. Demographic analyses indicated that the sample results could be generalized to the population of Millard families not enrolled in public schools, with the exception of home-school families (who were under-represented).*

*The survey questions asked parents what private schools offer that Millard does not offer, and whether there were aspects of the Millard Public School program to which parents did not want their children exposed. Results suggested that religious instruction and strict discipline policies topped the list of things that parents said they were seeking in private schools.*

*In response to the question about aspects of Millard's program that parents were trying to avoid, the top-ranked categories included: discipline (actually perceived lack of strict discipline), values (or lack of parent-approved values), sex education, and certain aspects of curriculum and instruction. The responses to this latter question were much less in number than to the first question (293 responses saying that the parents were seeking religious instruction vs. 75 responses in which discipline was mentioned as the top-ranked item in the second question).*

*Between-group analyses also suggested that some categories of responses were significantly different across groups defined by grade-level of instruction and by Catholic vs. non-Catholic school of choice. Results can be examined for implications for program improvement and for future public information campaigns.*

# STUDY OF REASONS GIVEN FOR ENROLLING STUDENTS IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The Millard Public School District serves more than 17,600 students. Another 2,400 school age youth reside within the boundaries of the district but attend private schools.

Growth in private school numbers (collectively) the last two years has exceeded the Millard Public Schools' growth. While the Millard district is still growing, the year-to-year growth is much less than the 500 to 1,000 yearly student increase of the 1970s and the 300 to 500 per year increase of the 1980s. Part of the reason for the decrease in the Millard Public Schools' growth rate is maturation of neighborhoods (except in the southwest portion of the district). Another reason is that the private schools have increased their "market share" of the student growth. The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of the reasons that parents enroll their students in private schools.

Such an understanding of <u>why</u> patrons choose private schools was considered important for several reasons. First of all, implications for Millard Public Schools program improvement could result from an analysis of why parents choose private schools. Secondly, each year one or more members of the district's strategic planning team have asked if we know why we have students enrolling in private schools. That data could be useful for the internal and external analysis which is part of the annual update process of strategic planning. In addition, this study has never been carried out before in Millard, and the empirical research published on this topic is scant.

## METHOD

Nebraska's state law requires that each public school district maintain a "census" on students living within the boundaries of that district, regardless of whether the students are enrolled in public schools. According to our information, in the Spring, 1995 semester, 2,375 school age students reside within the Millard boundaries but attend private school or are home-schooled. For purposes of this study, we pulled a 50% random sample, and then examined the list of students and eliminated same-household siblings to the greatest degree possible. (This was done so that we would not be sending more than one survey to the same household.) This procedure resulted in sending out 1,107 surveys. We received back 384 responses, for a return rate of 34.7%.

As one would expect, this return rate is somewhat lower than the usual return that we get when we survey parents of our students (typically around 50%). Still, 384 responses should be a substantial enough return to yield stable and generalizable results, provided that the sample is representative of the larger population of nearly 2,400 students.

We received returns representing 26 private schools, out of 31 schools that serve the full population of Millard private school students -- 84% of the schools were therefore represented in the sample. There were nine schools that were heavily represented in the data (at least ten returns from parents with children in each of these sites); these schools are those either serving large numbers of our students or are those that are physically placed within the boundaries of the Millard district. These nine schools together account for 329 out of the 384 returns (85.7%).

We also coded the responses as to whether they were from a Catholic school or not. In the population, approximately 80% of the students (in Millard) attending private schools attend a

Catholic school. In the sample, 83.9% attended a Catholic school, 16.1% attended a school that is not Catholic, and an additional 5 responses did not indicate school.

The one area where we do not seem to have good representation of the population is in the return from home-schooled children. The population figure is in the five to six percent range -- i.e., 5%-6% of the total non-public school students are home-schooled. However, we only have one return in our sample from a home-schooled family.

Based on these data, one could argue that the survey sample is representative of the population in all regards, with the exception of under-representing the home-school students that reside within our boundaries.

Other demographic information on the sample shows that of the 384 responses, 259 were parents of elementary or middle school aged children and 97 were parents of high school students. The remaining 28 were either in K-12 schools or could not be characterized by grade level. Also, at least 34 of the 384 respondees had children in more than one private school (typically in schools of different grade levels).

A copy of the instrument used in this study is included in Appendix A. Since we had few preconceived notions about the reasons that parents would offer, we decided to use a very open-ended survey. The first question simply asked in which school and at what grade level the child is enrolled. The second question asked what the private school offers that Millard Public Schools does not offer. The next question asked if there were aspects of the education in Millard to which the parents did not want their child exposed. And the last question was an open-ended one, asking if there were any other comments the parent would like to offer, regarding reasons for enrolling his or her child in a private school.

Although the questionnaire did not explicitly ask for a response regarding whether parents had previously had children enrolled in Millard Public Schools, a number of parents did mention this in one or more of their responses. Based on that information, we know that at least 84 of the 384 had previously had children enrolled in Millard Public Schools (21.9%). One should consider this figure as a "lower boundary" of the percentage with previous experience with Millard Schools because the question was not directly asked. That is, we can say that at least 1/5 to 1/4 of the parents had experience with Millard Public Schools. The actual percentage who previously had children enrolled in Millard is no doubt higher than the 22%.

The data reduction methodology involved first transcribing all of the returned surveys. A content analysis then looked for themes or major concepts that occur in the 384 surveys. The data suggested that 25 categories of response could account for the parents' responses to the three questions on the survey. These were coded as "present/absent" (computer codes 1.0/0.0) in order to allow numerical frequencies, crosstabulations, and other analyses. Appendix B contains the codes and some examples of the kinds of comments that were assigned to each of the codes.

## RESULTS

The first three tables show the simple frequency counts for the three open-ended questions. The numbers obviously sum to more than 384; this is because an individual's response may have been coded for more than one theme or concept.

The first question asked about offerings in the private schools that Millard does not offer. The overwhelming response was regarding religious aspects of the students' education. The second most frequently mentioned theme was the notion of discipline. (Referring to the appendix that gives some

examples of what was coded as "discipline", it is apparent that this concept includes respect for authority, teachers, and adults, and self-control, as well as specific discipline programs.)

After those two response categories, there was a significant fall-off to the remaining categories, ranging from curriculum (frequency of 78), values (frequency of 63), and class size (frequency of 59), down to family tradition (3 responses) and sex education (4 responses) and non-specific negative comments (1 response). Compared with 293 instances in which religion was mentioned and 145 instances of discipline being mentioned, the other categories are relatively infrequently mentioned.

Question three was the question regarding whether there were aspects of the Millard schools' education to which you did not want your child exposed. The highest frequency category here had only 75 responses (compared with 293 responses on question 2). Discipline (typically a comment on lack of discipline or lack of student respect for teachers or adults) was followed by: values, sex education, curriculum, and safety concerns. These constituted the five most-mentioned categories. The least-mentioned categories included such factors as class size, communication, activities, leadership, non-specific negative comments, single sex schools, and sex education.

One of the things noted from the raw protocols was that the responses did not always exactly match the nature of the question that was asked. As a result, it seemed worthwhile to look descriptively at the frequency of categories by simply collapsing across all three of the open-ended items. This analysis essentially addresses how often a concept or theme was mentioned in any of the three questions. The rank order of the items is similar of the rank order of question two because of the high frequency of response on question two. However, the responses are not exactly in the same rank order as question two. The top two categories are still religion and discipline, when

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collapsed across all three items. The third most frequently mentioned category is the concept of values, followed by curriculum, academic rigor, cohesiveness, safety, and student-teacher relationships. The least-mentioned categories are some of the same ones as on the other items, with the early dismissal being mentioned by one person and non-specific negative comments from five responses.

Tables 5 and 6 describe the between-group analyses, presenting categories which showed statistically significant differences between groups. Table 5 summarizes the significant response differences between grade-levels. Table 6 summarizes differences between Catholic schools' parents' responses ("Catholic" responses) as a group vs. responses from parents of students attending non-Catholic private schools ("non-Catholic" responses).

Differences between Grade-Levels

Differences between groups were established by (Chi-square) analysis of categorical responses from high school respondees versus elementary and middle (many of the private schools are K-8 schools, serving what we would consider elementary and middle school age students). All of the differences discussed and presented in Tables 5 and 6 are statistically significant at the .05 level. That is, these differences would be expected to be found in the sample fewer than one time out of twenty by chance alone (assuming there were no differences in the population).

The differences for categorical variables are established by determining whether a disproportional number of responses are represented in one group or the other. It does not matter that the two groups are not equal in total numbers; the statistic used is based on the proportion or percentage responding in a particular way, in the groups being compared. There were seven categories that showed significant differences by grade level for question two. Table 5 shows the

proportions (percentages) by grade-level.

The parents of lower-grade students tended to mention religion in response to Question 2 at a significantly higher level than did the high school students' parents. Similarly, parental involvement and control was mentioned by elementary/middle parents at a rate that was three times the rate of the high school.

School size was mentioned as a concern by more than one-fourth of the high school respondees, but was mentioned by only 3.1% of the elementary/middle school respondees. Academic rigor was twice as likely to have been mentioned by the parents of high school students; and opportunity to participate in activities was mentioned much more frequently on the high school surveys.

Class size/individual attention was more frequently mentioned at the high school level; also, the issue of student-teacher relationships/dedicated teachers was mentioned three times as often by high school parents as the elementary/middle school parents.

Question three (the question asking whether there were aspects of the Millard program to which you did not want your child exposed) also showed several differences between grade levels of survey respondents. The issue of sex education was mentioned much more frequently by elementary/middle respondees than by high school. School size (as it was in question 2) was also mentioned much more by high school than by lower grade parents. Curriculum and curriculum-related issues were mentioned in almost one-fifth of the lower grade responses, but only by 4% of the high school responses.

Question four was the question that was simply an open-ended question (e.g., do you have any other comments for us); only two categories showed significant grade-level differences: 1)

parental involvement and control was mentioned more than twice as often by lower grade parents than by high school parents, and 2) student-teacher relationships/dedicated teachers was mentioned by high school parents twice as frequently as by elementary/middle school parents.

Differences between Catholic and Non-Catholic Parents' Responses

The other between group analyses examined Catholic and non-Catholic responses from the private school sample (Table 6). Results for question two showed that there were two categories that significantly distinguished Catholic and non-Catholic responses: 1) approximately three times as many Catholic responses mentioned small school size as an issue, compared to the non-Catholic responses, and 2) mention of curriculum or curriculum-related issues was about three times as prevalent in the non-Catholic group.

Question three resulted in seven categories that distinguished Catholic from non-Catholic responses. Mention of religion (actually, lack of religion in public education) was 2 1/2 times as likely in the non-Catholic group. The issue of sex education in public schools was almost 4 times as prevalent in the non-Catholic group as in the Catholic group. Mention of values (or perceived lack of values) in public education was almost twice as frequently occurring in the non-Catholic group. School safety and related issues were nearly three times as frequently occurring in the Catholic group as in the non-Catholic group. Positive, unsolicited references to the Millard program (for example, "We think Millard has a good program but we were interested in the religious training of the private schools.") were more likely to occur in the Catholic sample than in the non-Catholic sample. Mention of school size was more of an issue for Catholic parents than non-Catholic and, as in question 2, discussion of curriculum and curriculum-related concerns were four times as frequently occurring in the non-Catholic sample as in the Catholic sample.

Question four also showed a few categories that significantly distinguished Catholic and non-Catholic responses. Mention of values (either against perceived Millard Public School values or in favor of other values not present in Millard) was twice as frequently occurring in the non-Catholic group as in the Catholic group. The issue of family tradition distinguished the groups because zero percent of the non-Catholic group mentioned it, whereas 6.3% mentioned it in the Catholic group. And, as in questions two and three, mention of curriculum and curriculum-related issues was much more likely to occur in the non-Catholic group.

## CORRELATIONS AMONG CATEGORIES

It is clear that the responses to the 25 different categories are not all independent of each other. Factor analysis is a statistical method for examining relationships among indicators within a sample of responses. Since question 2 had the greatest quantity of responses, we ran the categories for that question through a factor analysis to see: 1) if any meaningful factors could be extracted from the 25 indicators and 2) if those factors could account for a substantial portion of the variation among the 25 indicators while collapsing to a smaller set of measures. The factor analysis of question 2 did yield ten factors accounting for 58.5% of the variance in the correlation matrix of all 25 indicators.

The factors which seemed to be the strongest and most interpretable measures of interrelationships included:

| Indicators | Factor Loadings |
|---|---|
| Activities | .787 |
| School Size | .680 |
| Communication | .614 |
| Class Size | .594 |
| Academic Rigor | .518 |
| Religion | -.477 |
| Non-specific Negative | .855 |
| Governance | .719 |
| Curriculum | .675 |
| Worth the $$ | .548 |
| Structure | .522 |
| Uniforms | .722 |
| Discipline | .649 |
| Family Tradition | .775 |
| Single-sex School | .682 |
| Sex Education | .720 |
| Parental Involvement | .532 |
| Values | .521 |

## Meaning of the Factors

The above factors show which categories of responses tend to group together. The higher

factor loadings mean that particular indicator is the stronger representative of the factor. The results for the first factor show that discussion of participation in activities and school size tended to be mentioned together. The next factor shows that communication, class size, academic rigor and religion were correlated, although religion was loaded in the opposite direction from the other three (meaning that parents who mentioned communication, class size, and academic rigor tended not to be the ones who mentioned religion, and vice versa). "Non-specific negative" comments and issues of governance tended to be mentioned together, as did curriculum and "the expense is worth it" and comments about structure. Comments about uniforms and discipline were related, as were the issues of family tradition and desire for a single gender school. The last factor in the above table shows that sex education, parental involvement, and values were correlated and all loaded positively on the same factor.

## SUMMARY

A search of the computerized educational research literature base for the last 5 years only located a couple of empirical studies concerning parental choice of public or private schools. These are briefly summarized in Appendix C. Generally, the results of the Millard study are in alignment with the other studies. Our results present a picture of the reasons given by parents for choosing private schools. The most frequently occurring response to the question about private schools' offering was the incorporation of religious education into the curriculum. Clearly, a public school district cannot compete in this arena.

Some of the other results may have implications for programming and/or for a public information campaign. Although some policies and procedures regarding student discipline have

strengthened in the last couple of years, that may be an area where some additional attention could be focused. Some other changes are quite recent and may not be well understood out in the larger community. A re-structuring of learner outcomes to focus on academic content areas, more direct instruction in phonics in the primary grades, new assessments in writing, reading, and math are examples of aspects of the Millard program that may not be common knowledge among patrons who send their students to private schools. Although Millard does have (high and) increasing student achievement scores, has more than its share of academic honors, and has a complete offering of advanced placement courses, the perception that "academic rigor" is not as great as it should be may require some attention.

Similarly, concerns related to safety, parent involvement, and student/teacher relations could be part of a set of efforts to inform the public about Millard's programs (and data -- from sources like the Effective School Battery). Overall, the results seem to fall into three categories: 1) Concerns and issues that are <u>not</u> capable of being addressed by a public school district (e.g., religion), 2) Concerns that may require study for implications for program improvement (such as discipline) or changes (such as school size), and 3) Concerns or issues in the survey responses that imply more (or different) public information. Some of the responses may cross these three categories-- for example, the issue of "values". That category included responses that would be characterized as some parents wanting us to include <u>more</u> of the values that they desire, while some parents object to what they perceive as the values that the district does put forth (see the examples in Appendix B). In the former, there may be relatively little that the district can do, while in the latter case, there may be some changes that could be pursued.

Some of the findings showed significant differences regarding responses from different groups

of private school parents. Those results may be important to inform us that the "private school parents" as a population do not all hold the same views. Different issues are important for parents of private high school age students and for parents of K-8 students. Also, the approximately 20% of the population that attend non-Catholic schools seem to hold different opinions in a number of areas, compared to the 80% who attend Catholic schools. As we think about crafting a response from these results, it is important to keep the between-group differences in mind.

# TABLE 1

**Question 2: What does your child's school offer that Millard Public Schools do not?**

| | Number of Responses |
|---|---|
| Religion | 293 |
| Discipline | 145 |
| Curriculum | 78 |
| Values | 63 |
| Class Size | 59 |
| Academic Rigor | 53 |
| Cohesiveness | 44 |
| Student-Teacher Relation | 42 |
| School Size | 38 |
| Structure | 36 |
| Uniforms | 31 |
| Parent Involvement | 31 |
| Activities | 23 |
| Safety | 22 |
| Communication | 11 |
| Single-sex School | 8 |
| Governance | 8 |
| Sex Education | 4 |
| MPS - Good Education | 3 |
| Family Tradition | 3 |
| Worth the money | 1 |
| Taxes | 1 |
| Non-specific Negative | 1 |
| Leadership | 0 |
| Early Dismissal | 0 |

# TABLE 2

**Question 3: Are there aspects of the educational experience in Millard Public Schools to which you do not want your child exposed?**

| | Number of Responses |
|---|---|
| Discipline | 75 |
| Values | 67 |
| Sex Education | 61 |
| Curriculum | 60 |
| Safety | 59 |
| Religion | 46 |
| School Size | 40 |
| Academic Rigor | 27 |
| MPS - Good Education | 26 |
| Cohesiveness | 24 |
| Structure | 23 |
| Student-Teacher Relation | 21 |
| Parent Involvement | 12 |
| Governance | 10 |
| Class Size | 9 |
| Uniforms | 8 |
| Leadership | 4 |
| Communication | 3 |
| Non -Specific Negative | 2 |
| Single-sex School | 2 |
| Activities | 2 |
| Early Dismissal | 1 |
| Family Tradition | 1 |
| Taxes | 0 |
| Worth the Money | 0 |

# TABLE 3

**Question 4: Any other comments about your reasons for enrolling your child in a private school.**

| | Number of Responses |
|---|---|
| Religion | 73 |
| Academic Rigor | 58 |
| Discipline | 50 |
| Values | 48 |
| MPS - Good Education | 46 |
| Curriculum | 37 |
| Parent Involvement | 37 |
| Student-Teacher relation | 36 |
| Cohesiveness | 35 |
| Governance | 24 |
| Family Tradition | 22 |
| Safety | 19 |
| Uniforms | 19 |
| Structure | 14 |
| School Size | 14 |
| Worth the money | 11 |
| Taxes | 10 |
| Class Size | 9 |
| Communication | 7 |
| Activities | 6 |
| Leadership | 4 |
| Non-specific Negative | 2 |
| Single-sex school | 2 |
| Sex education | 2 |
| Early dismissal | 0 |

# TABLE 4

**Responses from 384 Surveys - Collapsed across all three items.**

| | **Number of Responses** |
|---|---|
| Religion | 412 |
| Discipline | 270 |
| Values | 178 |
| Curriculum | 175 |
| Academic Rigor | 138 |
| Cohesiveness | 103 |
| Safety | 100 |
| Student-Teacher Relation | 99 |
| School Size | 92 |
| Parent Involvement | 80 |
| Class Size | 77 |
| MPS - Good Education | 75 |
| Structure | 73 |
| Sex Education | 67 |
| Uniforms | 58 |
| Governance | 42 |
| Activities | 31 |
| Family Tradition | 26 |
| Communication | 21 |
| Single-sex school | 12 |
| Worth the money | 12 |
| Taxes | 11 |
| Leadership | 8 |
| Non-Specific Negative | 5 |
| Early Dismissal | 1 |

# TABLE 5

**Question 2: Significantly different responses by grade-level (Elem/Mid vs High) (N = 259 Elementary/Middle; N = 97 High)**

Category: Religion -- expression, environment

| | % mentioning |
|---|---|
| Elem/Mid | 86.9% |
| High | 50.5% |

Category: Parental involvement and control

| | |
|---|---|
| Elem/Mid | 9.7% |
| High | 3.1% |

Category: School Size

| | |
|---|---|
| Elem/Mid | 3.1% |
| High | 27.8% |

Category: Academic Rigor

| | |
|---|---|
| Elem/Mid | 11.2% |
| High | 21.6% |

Category: Opportunity to participate in activities

| | |
|---|---|
| Elem/Mid | 0.4% |
| High | 19.6% |

Category: Class size, individual attention

| | |
|---|---|
| Elem/Mid | 6.6% |
| High | 37.1% |

Category: Student/teacher relations, dedicated teachers

| | |
|---|---|
| Elem/Mid | 6.2% |
| High | 18.6% |

**Question 3: Significantly different responses by grade-level (Elementary/Middle vs High)**

Category: Sex Education

| | |
|---|---|
| Elem/Mid | 17.8% |
| High | 6.2% |

Category: School Size

| | |
|---|---|
| Elem/Mid | 5.8% |
| High | 24.7% |

Category: Curriculum and Curriculum-related issues

| | |
|---|---|
| Elem/Mid | 19.3% |
| High | 4.1% |

**Table 5 Continued**

**Question 4: Significantly different responses by Grade-level (Elementary/Middle vs High)**

Category: Parental involvement and control

| | % mentioning |
|---|---|
| Elem/Mid | 12.0% |
| High | 5.2% |

Category: Student-teacher relations, dedicated teachers

| | |
|---|---|
| Elem/Mid | 6.9% |
| High | 14.4% |

# TABLE 6

**Question 2: Significantly different responses from Catholic and non-Catholic respondees. (N = 318 Catholic; N = 61 Non-Catholic; N = 5 Unknown)**

Category: Mention of small school size.

| | % mentioning |
|---|---|
| Non-Catholic | 3.3% |
| Catholic | 11.3% |

Category: Mention of curriculum or curriculum-related issues.

| | |
|---|---|
| Non-Catholic | 44.3% |
| Catholic: | 15.7% |

**Question 3: Significantly different responses from Catholic and non-Catholic respondees.**

Category: Mention of religion (or lack of religion in public education)

| | |
|---|---|
| Non-Catholic | 24.6% |
| Catholic | 9.4% |

Category: Mention of sex education in public schools.

| | |
|---|---|
| Non-Catholic | 41% |
| Catholic | 11% |

Category: Mention of values (or lack of values in public education)

| | |
|---|---|
| Non-Catholic | 27.9% |
| Catholic | 15.1% |

Category: Mention of school safety and related issues.

| | |
|---|---|
| Non-Catholic | 6.6% |
| Catholic | 17.3% |

Category: Positive mention of Millard program

| | |
|---|---|
| Non-Catholic | 1.6% |
| Catholic | 7.9% |

Category: Mention of school size.

| | |
|---|---|
| Non-Catholic | 3.3% |
| Catholic | 11.9% |

Category: Mention of Curriculum or curriculum related issues.

| | |
|---|---|
| Non-Catholic | 42.6% |
| Catholic | 10.4% |

**Table 6 Continued**

**Question 4: Significantly different responses from Catholic and non-Catholic respondees.**

Category: Mention of values (either against MPS values or in favor of other values not present)

| | % mentioning |
|---|---|
| Non-Catholic | 21.3% |
| Catholic | 11.0% |

Category: Mention of family tradition.

| | |
|---|---|
| Non-Catholic | 0% |
| Catholic | 6.3% |

Category: Mention of curriculum or curriculum related issues.

| | |
|---|---|
| Non-Catholic | 24.6% |
| Catholic | 6.9% |

# APPENDIX A

## Parent Survey

**MILLARD PUBLIC SCHOOLS**
**PRIVATE SCHOOL STUDENTS**
**PARENT OPINION SURVEY**
**1994-1995**

This survey is part of an overall plan to evaluate community satisfaction with district programming. Please take a few minutes to respond to the following items. Return the completed survey in the enclosed postage-paid envelope. Thank you for your time and effort.

1. **In which school and grade is your child currently enrolled?**

   **School:** _____

   **Grade:** _____

2. **What does your child's school offer that Millard Public Schools do not?**

_____

_____

_____

3. **Are there aspects of the educational experience in Millard Public Schools to which you do not want your child exposed?**

_____

_____

_____

4. **Any other comments about your reasons for enrolling your child in a private school?**

_____

_____

_____

# APPENDIX B

## Categories of Coded Responses, Examples

| Code | Examples of responses |
|---|---|
| rel: | *Positive aspects of private school* |
| | religious instruction |
| | religion / morals / ethics integrated in curriculum |
| | teachers and priests are examples of moral behavior |
| | morality, religious morals |
| | weekly mass / church service |
| | we wanted a Catholic school |
| | religious background and environment |
| | Christian attitudes and ideals |
| | can celebrate religious holidays |
| | prayer in school |
| | nurtures child's spirit as well as mind |
| | *Negative aspects of public school* |
| | opposition to anything religious in public schools |
| | you can't create self-esteem in an environment that ignores God |
| comm: | *Positive aspects of private school* |
| | better parent / school communication |
| | better parent / teacher relationship |
| | education in school curriculum |
| | principal knows all students and families |
| dis: | *Positive aspects of private school* |
| | more controlled atmosphere for teachers |
| | more discipline, consistent enforcement of discipline |
| | closer supervision of students |
| | private schools can expel problem students |
| | expect better behavior from students |
| | promotes self-control, respect for authority |
| | discipline with purpose program |
| | discipline is a cooperative effort between parents and teachers |
| | *Negative aspects of public school* |
| | lack of respect for teachers in public schools |
| sexed: | *Positive aspects of private school* |
| | sex education based on Christian values |
| | *Negative aspects of public school* |
| | teaching about contraception, abortion |
| | teaching sex ed without religious values |
| | coed sex ed classes |
| | sex ed is eliminating inhibitions students should have regarding sexuality |
| | don't emphasize abstinence in sex ed |

| Code | Examples of responses |
|---|---|
| values: | *Positive aspects of private school* |
| | teaches independence |
| | positive peer models |
| | teaches respect, compassion, caring, generosity, service |
| | teaches work ethic, self-discipline, personal responsibility |
| | values are stressed, consistently reinforced |
| | what is important to us is reinforced at school |
| | respect among students, parents, and staff |
| | *Negative aspects of public school* |
| | acceptance of "alternative lifestyles", new age culture |
| | "one world order" agendas |
| | need to stay away from excessive political correctness |
| | negative peer pressure at MPS |
| | flaunting material goods |
| | racism |
| uniforms: | *Positive aspects of private school* |
| | dress codes, uniforms make school more conducive to learning |
| | students look nice and neat |
| | *Negative aspects of public school* |
| | too much competition over clothing in public schools |
| parinv: | *Positive aspects of private school* |
| | more parental commitment to children's education |
| | more control over my child's education |
| | parents involved in their child's education |
| | parents, teachers, and administrators work cooperatively |
| | families have input into decisions, not just administration or school board |
| | *Negative aspects of public school* |
| | limited parent involvement in MPS |
| | the bureaucracy |
| cohesiv: | *Positive aspects of private school* |
| | small community |
| | community support |
| | family atmosphere |
| | small atmosphere |
| | more interaction among parents |
| | the students have become very close |
| | more caring and responsible parents |
| | private schools can reject those who don't have the same ideals |
| | my child spends the day with people with my morals, ethics, standards |

| Code | Examples of responses |
|---|---|
| cohesiv: (cont.) | *Negative aspects of public school*<br>I don't want my children exposed to undesirable delinquents<br>some parents allow too much promiscuity<br>too many parents side with their children on discipline<br>students with no morals and no parental supervision |
| safety: | *Negative aspects of public school*<br>violence, drugs, guns, alcohol<br>afraid of gangs<br>stealing<br>lack of interest in child safety<br>a public high school would scare me<br>safety of our children before and after school is a concern for us |
| mpsok: | *Positive aspects of public school*<br>the teachers in MPS are great<br>my older children got good educations in MPS<br>we had a good experience with MPS K-8<br>MPS provides a quality education<br>services provided by MPS are excellent<br>we hope cooperation between MPS and parochial schools will continue<br>thanks for being sensitive enough to ask for our input<br>we wouldn't hesitate to enroll in MPS if parochial school wasn't available<br>my child will go to MPS for high school<br>MPS elementary was great<br>MPS elementaries sound good, not sure about the middle schools |
| gov: | *Positive aspects of private school*<br>no busing to distant school<br>*Negative aspects of public school*<br>too much governmental control<br>public schools waste too much money<br>the public schools' hands are tied by the government<br>the needs/wants of the few are allowed to overrule the good of the many<br>teachers are not able to exercise authority and control<br>unions influence the educators<br>the state does not give the teachers or administrators any real power |
| schlsz: | Positive aspects of private school<br>private schools are smaller<br>*Negative aspects of public school*<br>large public high schools |

| Code | Examples of responses |
|---|---|
| rigor: | *Positive aspects of private school* |
| | more homework, strong study skills |
| | higher expectations, expect each child to perform at their best |
| | more challenge |
| | standardized test scores are higher |
| | opportunities for individuals to excel |
| | student can work at his/her own pace |
| | my child does more advanced work than neighbors' children in MPS |
| | more academics in kindergarten |
| | academic excellence is stressed |
| | student ethic to work and do well, not "cool" to do poorly, just get by |
| | more Prep students attend and succeed in college than MPS students |
| | dual enrollment; my child is taking college classes in high school |
| | *Negative aspects of public school* |
| | MPS seems to just push children through |
| | weak Challenge program in MPS |
| struc: | *Positive aspects of private school* |
| | structured environment |
| | doors on classrooms |
| | quieter atmosphere |
| | teacher-centered classroom |
| | atmosphere more conducive to learning, better learning environment |
| | structure and control helps students who aren't highly motivated |
| | same school K-8 |
| | all-day kindergarten |
| | daycare adjacent to school |
| | the school is close to our home |
| | *Negative aspects of public school* |
| | open classroom concept |
| | too much freedom for elementary and middle school students |
| | too many distractions in the classroom |
| activ: | *Positive aspects of private school* |
| | intramural sports |
| | more sports opportunities |
| | able to participate in any activity or sport |
| traditn: | *Positive aspects of private school* |
| | my spouse and I went to private schools |
| | it is a tradition; his father attended Prep |
| | my wife wanted it that way |

| Code | Examples of responses |
|---|---|
| clssz: | *Positive aspects of private school* |
| | better teacher / child ratio |
| | smaller classes |
| | can teach more individually |
| | more individual student attention |
| worth$: | *Positive aspects of private school* |
| | private schools are a bargain here |
| | private schools are a financial sacrifice, but worth the cost |
| taxes: | *Negative aspects of public school* |
| | private school tuition should be tax deductible |
| | we should be able to direct our taxes to the school of our choice |
| | the property taxes are outrageous |
| | MPS should make summer school available to everyone |
| | MPS excludes private school students from opportunities |
| curr: | *Positive aspects of private school* |
| | basic curriculum, teaches the foundations |
| | strong curriculum |
| | phonics |
| | help for a mild learning disability |
| | student has choice of materials to work with |
| | a solid academic program |
| | proven curriculum, not experimental or the latest popular method |
| | we want and have OBE |
| | more technology in our child's school |
| | Suzuki violin and Spanish classes in lower grades |
| | preparatory curriculum in HS, geared toward college-bound students |
| | *Negative aspects of public school* |
| | we don't like OBE |
| | don't want non-academic outcomes in OBE |
| | emphasis on self-esteem, political correctness over academics |
| | Goals 2000 |
| | I have reservations about the middle school curriculum |
| | fads such as whole language and OBE |
| earlydis: | *Negative aspects of public school* |
| | Wednesday 2:00 early dismissal |
| strel: | *Positive aspects of private school* |
| | it's OK for teachers to hug students |
| | loving, nurturing attitude |
| | teachers care about whether children learn |
| | real concern of teachers for students |
| | more dedicated teachers in private schools |

| Code | Examples of responses |
|---|---|
| strel: (cont.) | *Negative aspects of public school*<br>some public school parents say teachers don't know who their kids are<br>lack of school spirit in public schools |
| onesex: | *Positive aspects of private school*<br>stresses the importance of a good education for women<br>more leadership opportunities in same-sex school |
| leader: | *Negative aspects of public school*<br>lack of leadership in MPS principal, not supportive of teachers<br>not impressed with MPS principal at Kindergarten roundup<br>weed out poor administrators in MPS |
| flame: | *Negative aspects of public school*<br>my child will not be exposed to any aspects of MPS<br>I want the best education for my children and MPS is not it |

# APPENDIX C

## Summary of Empirical Research

Review of articles with empirical research on private school choice:

Maddaus, J. (1990). *The problem of "location" in parental choice of school.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Boston, MA, April.

Maddaus states that "little systematic research has been conducted on parental choice, and the published research that exists is hardly conclusive." (p. 3) He cites the two largest studies on parental choice from the 1980's which both found that academic quality was the most important consideration for parents making decisions about school enrollment. Most parents in these studies, however, were not currently involved in making enrollment decisions. Only 19.7% and 25.7% of public school parents in the two studies had considered other schools at the time of current enrollment. One of the two studies apparently assumed that enrolling a child in a private school represented an active choice, while the other study reported that only 34.3% of private school parents said they had considered other schools at the time of current enrollment.

Maddaus cites another study of a public school choice "voucher" program in which 70.9% of parents gave "location" as a factor in school choice. The authors of that study had dismissed "location" as educationally irrelevant. Maddaus argues, "If one adopts, as most parents implicitly do, a wholistic view of child development focusing on social, emotional and moral as well as cognitive growth, then considerations related to 'location' are indeed 'educationally relevant'." (p. 8) Maddaus studied the importance of "location" by interviewing parents who had transferred or were considering transferring their children from one school (public or private) to another or who had considered more than one school for kindergarten enrollment.

Maddaus reports that "most of the parents interviewed shared a common perspective with respect to child-rearing and its relationship to choice of school." (p. 16)

> [They] identified the acquisition of moral values, including respect for adults in authority, respect for peers, respect for public and private property, and hard work, as an essential part of preparation for responsible adult life. These parents tried to teach these values at home, but they realized that their children were also influenced by both children and adults in the neighborhood and at school. They saw it as their duty to manage their children's lives so that they would grow up adhering to the values they viewed as necessary. (p. 17)

Public schools, Catholic schools, and a private school were in the area studied. "Catholic schools are perceived to be better able to maintain control over students' behavior in school, and to promote values consistent with good behavior outside school as well." (p. 21)

Some parents commented on their children's experience at the neighborhood public school:

> Of those parents whose children had actually attended the [neighborhood public] school at some point, past or present, there were a significant number of positive comments, especially with respect to encouragement their children had

received from particular teachers. But there were also numerous negative comments, most frequently on the subject of discipline. (p. 27)

Maddaus concludes, "For most of the parents in this study, the overriding factor in choice of school was not cognitive learning but moral values." (p. 29)

> "What [parents] do want. it appears, is assured access for their children to morally good schools. Furthermore, it appears that, at least in general terms, the possibility of a concensus[sic] exists regarding what a morally good school is. A morally good school promotes respect for other people (both other students and adults, especially those in authority) and their property, and encourages hard work and responsible, productive, contributing activity." (p. 31)

Goldring, E. B. and Bauch, P. A. (1993). *Parent involvement and school responsiveness: Facilitating the home-school connection in schools of choice.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Atlanta, GA, April.

Goldring and Bauch surveyed parents of students attending Catholic schools and public magnet schools. Parents were asked about their reasons for choosing a particular school, about parents' activities facilitating the home-school relationship, and about activities and responsibilities on the part of the school that facilitate the home-school relationship. Reasons for school choice were divided into five categories. Percentages of parents of Catholic school students indicating each category as important in their decision were:

89.7% academic (academic programs and college preparation)
29.5% career (preparation for careers/jobs)
69.2% moral (moral/character development, religious education, shared values and beliefs)
75.6% disciplinary (discipline policies and safety)
26.5% convenience (availability of transportation and closeness of school to home)

Goldring and Bauch found that parents of Catholic school students are more likely than parents of public magnet school students to contact the school directly about course selection and their child's progress and to enforce rules at home about non-school issues such as watching TV, using the phone, and going out with friends.

> "In addition, Catholic school parents are even more likely . . . to feel that home-school communication is effective, that is, that the school responds to them quickly and makes them feel welcome and at ease when they need to contact or come to the school about a problem. However, Catholic school parents are less likely than magnet school parents to say that the school <u>requires</u> parent volunteering. Since Catholic schools have a tradition of parent involvement, it may be less necessary than in magnet schools to require involvement and more characteristic to invite parents to participate, especially in light of the greater emphasis in Catholic schools on helping parents feel at ease in approaching the school." (p. 22)